

poli d'un ventre de femme verrait le mal
interne qui le
conge*. The doctor himself, one feels, is
sick.

With this gift of generalisation, however,
which involves an imagination as active as an
immense automatic
telephone-exchange, there goes a kindred
gift for seeing
analogies, which serves in Proust both the
ironist and the
poet. For the ironic Proust loves discovering
likenesses in
ants to elephants, partly to magnify the ant,
as if he were
throwing it on a magic-lantern screen for
our clearer
vision of it; but pardy also, in a sort of mock-
heroic way,
as if to suggest mat even the mightiest
elephant is really
only a larger ant. Thus to Marcel's aunt,
who imagines
Swann to be merely a highly respectable
bourgeois, the
idea that he was really intimate with the
Prince of Wales,
would have appeared as extraordinary
'qu'aurait pu
Tetre pour une dame plus lettree la pensee
d'etre person-
ellement liee avec Aristee dont elle aurait
compris qu'il
allait, apres avoir cause avec elle, plonger au
sein des
royaumes de Thetis, dans un empire soustrait
aux yeux des
mortels et ou Virgile nous le montre re\$u a
bras ouverts'.
(Even the slight inaccuracy—for Aristaeus
visited the
nymph Gyrene, not Thetis—is typical of the
carelessness
which alternates in Proust with his
meticulous precision.)
Or with the same elaborate 'pince-sans-rire*
solemnity he
will compare the capricious but cast-iron
notions of Fran-
\$oise with the injunctions of Jehovah, *qui a

cote de
prescriptions feroces comme de massacrer
les enfants a la
mameUe, defendent avec une delicatesses
exag&ee de fake
bouillir le chevreau dans le lait de sa mere*.
This reconдите
burlesque is most characteristic. It can be
extremely
amusing; it can also, at times, forget that
'brevity is the
soul of wit*. Thus the sentence just quoted
meanders
on in the original into a second illustration
both super-
fluous and bathetic. One of the most
precious gifts of